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GAVIN MILLER

## THE APATHETIC FALLACY

IN *A STUDY OF HISTORY*, Arnold Toynbee advises his audience to beware what he calls the “apathetic fallacy.” Whereas “Ruskin warned his readers against the “‘pathetic fallacy’ of imaginatively endowing inanimate objects with life,” the historian needs to avoid “the converse error of applying to historical thought, which is a study of living creatures, a scientific method devised for the study of inanimate nature.”<sup>1</sup> Toynbee’s term was later adapted to psychology by R. D. Laing in his discussion of the tension between neuroscientific and interpersonal attitudes towards the infant:

If one does not feel that a baby feels, it is an almost irresistible conclusion that it must be an illusion to feel that it does. If one does feel for a baby’s feelings, one will find it difficult not to conclude that those who do not are suffering from a loss of sensibility more radical than the loss of one of the senses.

Have we here a pathetic fallacy or an apathetic fallacy?<sup>2</sup>

Laing, of course, firmly believed that the scientifically objectifying account of the infant involved a pseudoscientific pretense that the infant’s subjective experience was either unreal or, at the very least, irrelevant.

The apathetic fallacy may be diagnosed in fields other than history and psychology. Although John Searle does not use the term, he also, in essence, discovers an apathetic fallacy in the assumptions of modern philosophy: “We have the conviction that if something is real, it must be equally accessible to all competent observers. Since the seventeenth century, educated people in the West have come to accept an absolutely basic metaphysical presupposition: *Reality is objective*. This assumption has proved useful to us in many ways, but it is obviously false, as a moment’s

reflection on one's own subjective states reveals."<sup>3</sup> Searle calls for a philosophical rediscovery of mind, and warns us not to confuse "the epistemological sense of the subjective/objective distinction" with the "ontological sense": "There is a persistent confusion between the claim that we should try as much as possible to eliminate personal subjective prejudices from the search for truth and the claim that the real world contains no elements that are irreducibly subjective" (*RM*, p. 19).

I shall argue that the apathetic fallacy attributed by Toynbee, Laing and Searle to their respective disciplines is also apparent in literary criticism. The repudiation and neglect of subjective phenomena are applauded as necessary to literary inquiry; our investigations are supposedly epistemologically objective (rational, disinterested) only if they are about what is ontologically objective (equally accessible to all, not part of the "inner world" of subjectivity). This mistaken fusion of epistemological and ontological objectivity lurks in the founding texts of modern literary inquiry: the intentional fallacy, for instance, is putatively an error precisely because it introduces into critical inquiry an ontologically subjective phenomenon—namely, intended meaning. The disciplinary injunction to repudiate mental phenomena also functions as a gatekeeper that determines which parts of other disciplines can most easily migrate to literary inquiry. Lacanian theory moves so successfully from psychoanalysis to literary criticism precisely because it attempts to eliminate mentalist concepts from the psychoanalytic and psychiatric universe of discourse. Because of its commitment to an unrecognized apathetic fallacy, literary criticism continues to produce such egregious misreadings as Fredric Jameson's Lacan-inspired account of the "new sentence" in U.S. poetry. The most celebrated contemporary Marxist critic entirely misses the Marxist aesthetic of the new sentence because he is blinded by his Lacanian analogy, and by the general assumptions of literary-critical inquiry, to the meanings intended by those who write as part of this poetic movement.

## I

In their arguments "against theory," Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels contend that literary theory has typically and erroneously imagined that there may be two kinds of linguistic meaning.<sup>4</sup> One kind of meaning is constituted by the interplay of sign sequence and linguistic convention (I shall refer to this as "verbal meaning").<sup>5</sup> The other kind of meaning is constituted by what a speaker intends to say in

some particular use of a sign sequence (I shall refer to this as “intended meaning”). Literary theory then becomes entangled in competing claims for the superiority (and often the reality or unreality) of either of the two supposed kinds of meaning. Anti-intentionalist criticism, for instance, regards as sufficient a knowledge of the verbal meaning, howsoever indefinite or polysemous it may be. A certain kind of “moderate” intentionalist literary criticism, on the other hand, specifies verbal meaning by reference to a determining intention that constrains its indefinite possibilities.

Knapp and Michaels argue, however, that there is only intended meaning. They provide a *reductio ad absurdum* to make their point (“AT,” pp. 727–30). If there is indeed a kind of meaning that is constituted purely by the interplay of signs and rules, then such meaning exists in a relation of causal (rather than ontological) dependence upon a speaker’s intention. A meaningful sign sequence of this kind could therefore be produced by some non-intentional causality. If, for instance, marks resembling the words of a poem were produced by the action of the waves on a beach, then these words would have to be classed as meaningful even though they were produced without any agency. But this is absurd, argue Knapp and Michaels: the marks are not meaningful, they merely resemble meaningful signs. The only kind of meaning that exists is a speaker’s intended meaning. Indeed, it is only the essential intentionality of meaning that allows us to even conceive (mistakenly) of a separate verbal meaning—for it is the speaker’s intention to say something in a certain language that specifies the conventions relevant to the words that he or she produces.

One response to Knapp and Michaels is particularly relevant to my discussion of the apathetic fallacy in literary criticism. It may be argued that meaning cannot be identified with an “inner” semantic intention precisely because it seems absurd that a speaker could *ex hypothesi* intend a meaning which could not be construed from his words. Knapp and Michaels attack precisely this counter-argument: “Your meaning,” they respond, “doesn’t become a different meaning when you fail to express the meaning you intended” (“AT2,” p. 67). They argue that even if the speaker’s words fail under normal conventions to convey his intended meaning, the meaning remains his semantic intention, no matter what beliefs an interpreter might arrive at by considering the speaker’s actual words. To support this view, they give the example of a situation in which a car passenger successfully communicates his desire that the driver should stop the vehicle immediately, even though this intended

meaning is communicated with sounds that either contradict linguistic conventions, or escape them entirely ("AT2," pp. 65–66). Knapp and Michaels are not alone in arguing that linguistic convention is essentially an aid to the discovery of meaning, rather than essential to meaning itself. Their position is taken also by P. D. Juhl, who points out that "we do not ordinarily take a man to have *said*, or his utterance to mean, what we know or believe he did not mean (on the basis of our knowledge about the speaker, his facial expressions, gestures, what else he says, and so on), even if the rules of the language do not allow the sentence he uttered to mean what he intended to convey."<sup>6</sup>

Just why does the subjectivity, the "inwardness," of intended meaning appear to be a "knock-down" argument against intentionalism? One important consideration is surely what seem to be the intolerable epistemological consequences of allowing the meaning of an expression to be what the agent intended by it, even where this semantic intention breaks the rules of the speaker's language. If a seemingly secure conventional interpretation may fail to apprehend the speaker's semantic intention, then it would seem that any interpretation is ultimately hostage to a speaker's avowal of such a failure. The speaker would appear to have an absolute authority over his interpreters, who may, at any instant, find that their understanding was mistaken—that the speaker has by an arbitrary and capricious declaration entirely invalidated their understanding.

This concern about the speaker's (or the author's) capacity in strong intentionalist theories to pull the rug from under the interpreter's feet is reinforced when the entire discipline of literary criticism seems held hostage. In "The Intentional Fallacy," it is the supposed epistemological difficulties of intentionalism to which W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley ultimately object. Evidence that is irrelevant to the reading of a poem consists of "what . . . is private or idiosyncratic; not a part of the work as a linguistic fact: it consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations)."<sup>7</sup> The rhetoric of intention as revelation re-appears when they consider the hypothesis that one might simply write to T. S. Eliot and ask him what he wanted to say in his poetry: "such an answer to such an inquiry . . . would not be a critical inquiry. . . . Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle" ("IF," p. 18). To allow questions about the author's mental life into critical inquiry would be to subject a community of rational inquirers to the supposed incorrigible authority of the author's claims about his intention.

To prevent the subjection of hermeneusis to such autocratic or

theocratic authority (a subjection which would be seemingly the destruction of critical inquiry), Wimsatt and Beardsley develop a particular ontology of meaning in order to protect the epistemological objectivity of literary criticism. They hypothesize that meaning arises purely in the public interplay of sign and linguistic convention, without any constitution from the ontologically subjective realm of intention. Their anti-intentionalism is thus a democratic revolution of the poem against its authorial master, a revolution demanded by the methodological rigor necessary to constitute a disciplinary investigation.

Such is the seeming force of the argument against the author as "oracle," that even the apparently intentionalist theory of E. D. Hirsch accepts an anti-intentionalist ontology of meaning. As Juhl explains, Hirsch in fact "begins with the assumption that any literary text can be properly construed in a number of different ways, limited only by the principle of sharability" (*I*, p. 18). But if "literary interpretation is to be a science or discipline" (*I*, p. 18), then—according to Hirsch, at least—"we need a criterion which allows, at least in principle, one and only one interpretation . . . to qualify as correct or valid" (*I*, p. 19). Hirsch therefore characterizes the investigation of the author's semantic intention not as an investigation of meaning proper, but rather as a norm by which one constrains the essential polysemy of meaning so that the practice of literary criticism may begin.

Nonetheless, the "intention as revelation" argument, which seems to justify the hypothesis of a distinct verbal meaning, relies on our habits of thought rather than genuine epistemological problems with reports of intention. Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument appeals to a suspicion of so-called "first-person warranted claims" that was originally developed by behaviorism in opposition to introspective methods in psychology. As Charles P. Siewert explains, the behaviorist argument was, in essence, that because "introspection" can be performed "only on oneself, we are dealing here with a sort of observation that cannot be confirmed by others, as they cannot introspect one's states of mind."<sup>8</sup> Since "confirmability of claims by multiple investigators is . . . what distinguishes science from activities that rely crucially on the supposed special authority of particular individuals" (*SC*, p. 62), then there can be no methodological place for first-person warranted claims. However, in the case of first-person warranted claims of authorial intention, at any rate, such "special authority" is not to be found. These claims do not have the oracular character that Wimsatt and Beardsley suppose, for they are vulnerable to publically observable evidence that may impugn the author's sincerity

and authenticity. When an authorial claim about semantic intention is made that contradicts what seems to be the best interpretation of the author's words, it is not unproblematically authoritative. The author may be consciously trying to deceive us about her intentions (Noël Carroll gives a real example of a *prima facie* insincere claim).<sup>9</sup> Even when the claim of a different semantic intention seems sincere, the author may have misremembered, or be making some other self-deceiving error, yet without any consciously mendacious intent. Only if the author's claim about his intention is regarded as incorrigible, as possessing the traditional "mark of the mental,"<sup>10</sup> would the interpretation be immediately disconfirmed, and critical inquiry seemingly led towards "dark and elusive creatures of the mentalist night"<sup>11</sup> that only the author can reliably introspect.

My aim in reconstructing and extending the debate opened up by Knapp and Michaels is not so much to contribute directly to it (there is already a very thorough literature, and I find Knapp and Michaels' arguments to be convincing), but rather to articulate a particular assumption about what is needed to make literary criticism properly cognitive. As the author-as-oracle argument demonstrates, literary criticism typically requires an attitude of habitual anti-mentalism: to secure the epistemological objectivity of literary criticism, a wholly public ontology is demanded for its objects. Without such an ontology, critical inquiry putatively reverts to the supposed pre-scientific condition of psychology before behaviorism, when introspective methods allegedly demanded an oracular and incorrigible "self-observation." As I have argued, the erroneous fusion of epistemological and ontological objectivity is apparent in the anti-intentionalist theories of meaning criticized by Knapp and Michaels. Such theories exemplify the "apathetic fallacy" by which the subjective phenomena studied by a discipline are repudiated because they seem impossible to investigate. As behaviorism tried to do without conscious experience, so literary criticism aims—as it strives towards theoretical rigor—to do without the shadowy realm of the mental.

## II

Anti-mentalism is central to literary criticism's claim to a proper object and a methodical cognition of that object. It is also an element in the prestige of theories that literary criticism imports from other disciplines. This can be seen in literary theory's preference for a psychoanalytic paradigm that dispenses with the psyche: Lacanian theory, which

dominates psychoanalytic literary criticism, is—as much as the argument of “The Intentional Fallacy”—constructed upon a repudiation of the mental. While certain schools of psychoanalysis might refer to “mental processes, quite outside the personal consciousness,” such a mentalist account of the unconscious would be rejected by Lacanian theory.<sup>12</sup> This rejection occurs not so much because of the (debatable) incoherence of the concept of unconscious mental activity, but because of a more fundamental Lacanian aversion to the study of mental phenomena, whether in neurotic, psychotic, or even “normal” psychology.

When Lacan declares, “the great secret of psychoanalysis is that there is no psychogenesis,”<sup>13</sup> he explicitly opposes the thesis that we understand even the everyday, seemingly non-psychopathological actions of others by virtue of the empathic intersubjectivity posited by Karl Jaspers in *General Psychopathology*.<sup>14</sup> Lacan uses against Jaspers arguments developed by positivism, and particularly by behaviorism.<sup>15</sup> Understanding, Lacan contends, claims imaginative insight into other minds, but merely applies a pre-theoretical folk-psychology which “consists in thinking that some things are self-evident” (*P*, p. 6). Furthermore, the supposed Jaspers-style understanding of an action—e.g., that someone is crying because they have been slapped—fails to provide a causally sufficient explanation: “When one gets a smack there are many other ways of responding than by crying. One can return it in kind, or else turn the other cheek, or one can also say—*Hit me, but listen!*” (*P*, p. 6). Nor is there any statistical correlation provided by understanding which might substitute for a causally sufficient explanation: the suicide curve, for instance, shows that more suicides occur in spring, rather than in the dark days of autumn and winter, seasons which might seem more likely to motivate self-destruction (*P*, p. 7).

Lacan’s arguments share the same failings as those advanced by the positivists, since they assume what is in question—namely that a psychogenetic explanation could only be valid if it provided the kind of account given in the natural sciences (particularly in physics). Indeed, even as Lacan criticizes Jaspers for failing to live up to the nomothetic model of explanation, he offers his own distinct model for the understanding of actions. Lacan’s rather obliquely presented positive account places “psychogenesis” in the realm of observable quasi-linguistic behavior: “I remember a small boy who whenever he got a smack used to ask—*Was that a pat or a slap?* If he was told it was a slap he cried, that belonged to the conventions, to the rules of the moment, and if it was a pat he was delighted” (*P*, p. 6). Lacan offers his own way of removing the psyche



from “psychogenesis,” and he does so, in a somewhat *ad hoc* way, with structuralist concepts. The child in Lacan’s example must discriminate between a pat and a slap by drawing the correct—presumably conventional, rather than intended—contrastive boundary in a continuous phenomenon, *viz.* the strength of the smack. Correctly identifying this item then allows a response that is explicitly a matter of adherence to public conventions, rather than the expression of psychic life.

Whatever the merits of Lacan’s account, it indicates that Lacanian theory strives towards an objective ontology. This is even more apparent when one considers the Lacanian transposition of the unconscious mind to a public and ultimately linguistic realm. Bruce Fink explains that, for Lacanians, “Truth is not so much ‘found’ or ‘uncovered’ by [psychoanalytic] interpretation, as created by it.”<sup>16</sup> In interpreting “what patients actually say over what they mean” (*LP*, p. 25), the Lacanian analyst does not claim to interpret communications from the unconscious mind. Rather, the “unconscious” is produced by interpretations of the analysand’s speech that challenge the analysand’s self image (so contradicting his intended meaning), but which are nonetheless compatible with his verbal productions (thereby drawing upon the indefinite possibilities of verbal meaning). For instance, in dealing with a homosexual patient who thinks of himself as loving his supportive heterosexual father (a father who is “one hundred percent behind *me*”), the analyst would regard the apparently elliptical statement “‘My father was a hundred percent behind’” as “a bona fide Freudian slip, allowing of the following translations: ‘My father was a complete ass,’ ‘My father was only interested in ass,’ ‘My father was only interested in anal sex,’ and so on” (*LP*, p. 23).

The ethics of the Lacanian “unconscious” are, I believe, less than benign. The interpretative practice that Fink describes seems indistinguishable from the hermeneutics of abuse directed at Barack Obama for his 2008 campaign comment that “you can put lipstick on a pig; it’s still a pig.”<sup>17</sup> This remark was meant as a metaphor for Republican policy, but was interpreted by the Republicans as a reference to Sarah Palin’s candidature for Vice-President. The “pig” in the metaphor, they insisted, was Palin, who had earlier joked—with implicit reference to herself—that the difference between “a hockey mom and a pit bull [terrier]” was “lipstick.”<sup>18</sup> Had only the Republicans been more Lacanian, they could have added that Obama’s repudiation of this interpretation indicated his pre-analytic investment in a specular image of wholeness and self-identity.

Fink condones the reconceptualization of the psychoanalytic unconscious as a publically observable verbal interaction in which—one might say—the therapist enforces a possible verbal meaning that challenges the analysand's preferred interpretation of his own words. (The phrase "analysand's preferred interpretation of his own words" here seems the best equivalent for what might otherwise be called the analysand's "intended meaning.") But for François Roustang, Lacan's attempt to mould psychoanalysis to "the ultimate requirements of scientific knowledge" merely repudiates the unconscious mind, the specific mental object of psychoanalysis.<sup>19</sup> Lacan's mistake, thinks Roustang, is to cast the instrument of psychoanalytic knowledge as its object: "Since we know the unconscious—source of the dream, the slip and the joke—only through language, the unconscious is structured like a language. Which is tantamount to saying: Since we can only know certain objects by looking at them, these objects are structured like eyes" (*LD*, pp. 111–12). Lacanians have endured withering scrutiny of the psychological claims seemingly made by their theory, especially Lacan's celebrated, or notorious, account of the "mirror stage."<sup>20</sup> Yet as both Fink and Roustang explain (albeit with contrary aims), the Lacanian project is informed by the same anti-mentalism as the once scientifically dominant program of behaviorist psychology. The latter tried to develop a general psychology with reference only to observable phenomena in relations of efficient causality.<sup>21</sup> Lacanians, on the other hand, try to reconceptualize psychoanalysis using linguistic concepts that eliminate any reference to a realm of unconscious mentation.

Lacanian theory's repudiation of the mental extends from the normal and the neurotic "mind" (really, normal and psychoanalytic verbal interactions) to its account of psychosis. Language is again the essential object of inquiry: psychotic speech is regarded as lacking the reciprocal determination of part and whole demanded by hermeneusis. Fink explains that in normal speech, "Certain elements prepare the way for others, and none of the elements is completely independent: they are all 'chained together' (this is why Lacan uses the expression 'signifying chain')" (*LP*, p. 95). Yet, in psychosis, there is "a disturbance in the usual process of meaning making, and [it] is related to the sense in which *words are things* for the psychotic" (*LP*, p. 95). Without the part-whole structure of the "signifying chain," words become isolated signifiers, incapable of conveying any signified: a psychotic patient's speech may furnish various neologisms loaded with "a significance that he or she

often describes as ineffable or incommunicable,” but that these terms “cannot be explained or defined” by the psychotic indicates the rupture of the signifying chain in psychotic speech (*LP*, p. 95).

This Lacanian account of psychosis clearly recasts Jaspers’ quite traditional account of psychotic speech and action as “ununderstandable.” There is, though, at least one vital difference. Although Jaspers states that schizophrenic patients might “rave wildly, make meaningless gestures and carry out senseless acts,” he regards this nonsensical behavior, verbal and non-verbal, as an expression of “schizophrenic psychic life” (*GP*, p. 581). Neologisms, for instance, indicate that the schizophrenic really is having a unique experience: “schizophrenic patients find new words for their utterly indescribable body sensations—e.g. ‘es zirrt’ and so on” (*GP*, p. 581). Lacanian theory, however, adapts Jaspers’ account to an anti-mentalist program. That psychotic speech is ununderstandable can properly indicate only a malfunction in language, rather than warrant any inferences about the peculiarity of psychotic experience. Psychosis is therefore objectively reduced to a recurring aposiopesis which persistently severs the so-called “signifying chain.” Jaspers leaves at least the empirical possibility that a sufficiently plastic interpreter might understand a psychotic’s speech and action (and Laing believed that such understanding was indeed possible).<sup>22</sup> But for Lacanian theory, this is simply impossible, since there is nothing *to* understand in the psychotic’s words. Psychotic speech does not express, even in some recondite way, the nature of a psychotic’s “inner experience.”

### III

The repudiation of the mental in Lacan’s pseudo-structuralist account of normal, neurotic, and psychotic life is surely part of its claim to a properly scientific and rigorous development of Freudian ideas: structuralist anti-intentionalism and conventionalism provide, as Thomas Pavel argues, a promise of disciplinary modernization infused with “echoes of behaviourism and the project of the unity of science.”<sup>23</sup> Lacan’s structuralist (ontological) objectivity in the name of (epistemological) objectivity appeals also to literary theorists, who have been schooled, since the intentional fallacy at the very least, in the irrelevance of mental phenomena to their critical inquiries. The anti-mentalism of Lacanian psychoanalysis and post-war literary criticism fatally combine in Fredric Jameson’s influential, Lacan-inspired account of postmodern art as

"schizophrenic." In Jameson's analysis, the repudiation of consciousness is so extreme that he is unable to understand the Marxist meanings intended by some of the literary artists whose work he considers.

Jameson insists that, in making an analogy between contemporary art and psychosis, he need not ask whether Lacanian theory has "clinical accuracy": he is neither diagnosing postmodern artists as psychotic, nor proposing that Lacanian schizophrenia is the psychopathology typical of late-capitalist society.<sup>24</sup> I am not wholly convinced by this claim, for if postmodern "schizophrenia" and its accompanying challenge to historical narrative were only an issue for *avant-garde* art, then it would scarcely seem such a worry. Moreover, there is a difficulty that persists even if Jameson does in fact use Lacanian schizophrenia to offer no more than a "suggestive aesthetic model" (*P*, p. 26): the resulting aesthetic model, in its fusion of epistemological and ontological objectivity, absurdly repudiates and disregards authorial intention.

Admittedly, Jameson is not always consistent in the apathetic fallacy that he inherits from his clinical source. He to some extent presents schizophrenic speech as expressive of schizophrenic experience, rather than as a linguistic malfunction. He suggests, for instance, that the schizophrenic's temporal horizon has shrunk to a continual present: the schizophrenic personality cannot "extend pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold" (*P*, p. 25). But, against what seems to be a statement about time-consciousness, he also claims that "active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time" (*P*, p. 27). With this somewhat murky reduction of temporal continuity to a linguistic phenomenon, it is the ontologically objective interpretation of Lacan that wins out: "With the breakdown of the signifying chain, [...] the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (*P*, p. 27). In Jameson's account of Lacan (and in a manner faithful to the Lacanian program), temporal continuity is essentially a publically observable, and in that sense "objective," linguistic phenomenon.

I have argued that Lacan's ontologically objective reconceptualization of psychosis eliminates from Lacanian clinical practice even the barest possibility that one could understand a schizophrenic: all that a schizophrenic can do is endlessly perform his failed linguistic competence, rather than properly communicate anything about his experience. This same repudiation of the mental carries over into Jameson's aesthetics, where it is reinforced by the widespread anti-intentionalism

of literary inquiry. Jameson consequently precludes any possibility that the superficially “schizophrenic” artwork could do anything other than exemplify the failure of historical narrative under late capitalism. As a result, the U.S.’s most illustrious Marxist critic entirely misconstrues the homegrown Marxist poetic of the so-called “new sentence” in his reading of Bob Perelman’s poem “China.”

A small but significant body of literature has developed which politely, yet insistently points out the errors in Jameson’s account of “China.”<sup>25</sup> This poem, and others like it, Perelman himself explains, is “self-critical, ambitiously contextualized, and narrative in a number of ways. Far from being fragments, these sentences derive from a coherent, wide-ranging political analysis” (“PN,” p. 316). The central issue in this critical response to Jameson is the disjointedness of poems written with the “new sentence.” Although Jameson’s reading casts this disjunctiveness as essentially aposiopesis (he talks of its “schizophrenic fragmentation,” *P*, p. 28), Perelman identifies the same textual feature as parataxis. We have in the new sentence, according to the author of “China,” not a series of interrupted thoughts, but rather a coherent analysis in which connections are hinted at, rather than hypotactically developed. Perelman takes as an example poetry in the new sentence by Ron Silliman; he discovers a Marxist master-narrative linking “the domesticity of the kitchen with the spectacle of identical bungalows with the minute units of the pennies in the fountain with the small verbal differences between sentences that Quine ignores; the renters with the homeowners with the homeless person; housing policies with positivism with writing practices” (“PN,” p. 316). Perelman’s implicit admonition to Jameson—“any specific work written using the new sentence cannot be read in a focused way without attention to the original context” (“PN,” p. 321)—is thus a reminder that the new sentence was intended as a poetic expression of a particular response to post-war U.S. capitalism. To understand the new sentence, it is helpful to know something about the experiences and beliefs of the people that write with it.

Jameson’s error is to construe the “new sentence” as a failure to provide meaningful linguistic expression, rather than as the meaningful use of a particular rhetorical strategy: in Perelman’s words, “Where Jameson sees signifying chains snapping, Silliman sees the cobwebs of the reified narratives of false consciousness being swept away” (“PN,” p. 317). Indeed, that Jameson should even attempt a reading of the new sentence as aesthetically schizophrenic is particularly surprising since, as Juhl argues, we do not normally dismiss the linguistic deviations of

literary texts as a failure in meaning: “literary and especially poetic texts frequently violate the syntactic and semantic rules of the language in which they are written. If we construed those works in terms of the standard linguistic rules, . . . many of them would make little sense and some none at all” (*I*, p. 108). Although it might be argued that the new sentence is not properly a syntactic or semantic phenomenon, there is still no reason why textual disjointedness should immediately be identified with a lack of meaning. Noël Carroll’s example from film provides an analogy: “in *Man with a Movie Camera*, when the filmmaker Dziga Vertov intercuts shots of the activities of a Soviet cameraman with shots of the activities of all sorts of other Soviet workers, we interpret these juxtapositions as promoting the assertion that the Soviet cameraman is a worker, just like any other. However, this interpretation cannot rely upon the conventional meaning of juxtaposition in the cinema. Juxtaposition has no conventional meaning in film. Instead, in order to understand the shot chain, we ask ourselves what point Vertov intends to impart by means of these juxtapositions” (*BA*, pp. 192–93). The poetry of the “new sentence” is in a similar position: there is an intended meaning which can be gleaned from its abrupt transitions and juxtapositions—an intention which we can infer given the subject matter of the poetry, and what we know about its authors, their beliefs, and the wider cultural context.

However, in Jameson’s reading, Perelman and his fellow authors end up in a position parallel to that of the Lacanian psychotic. Their writing is taken as a specimen of postmodern aesthetic schizophrenia, rather than an as intentional expression that can be understood by conventional hermeneusis (with additional evidence for the interpretation coming, perhaps, from extra-poetic sources). The consequence of the apathetic fallacy within Jameson’s theory of the postmodern is thus to eliminate, by an academic *fiat*, the capacity for certain contemporary literary works to initiate and hold a conversation about the nature of the present. A contemporary text with *prima facie* disjunctive, paratactic, or aposiopetic properties becomes an instance of the “schizophrenic” aesthetic, regardless of whether the text itself, and the context and intentions of its author, would support such an interpretation. Jameson’s ontologically objective approach to the contemporary artwork regards even the U.S. Marxist aesthetic of the new sentence as an expression of the late-capitalist totality, rather than as a meaningful expression of the poet’s resistant response to this mode of social organization. Admittedly, Marxist theory is often skeptical about the capacity of subjectivity *per se* to

resist capitalism: the subject's identification with false, repressive needs, means that inner life is a perjured witness to the crimes of capitalism against human potential. But Jameson's Lacan-inspired repudiation of consciousness closes the Marxist universe of discourse, eliminating in theory what has not yet been eliminated in practice—namely, the subject's alienation and unhappiness in the world of consumer capitalism. That this apathetic fallacy should seem so necessary a component of rigorous critical inquiry surely indicates the success of what Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man* calls a "radical empiricist onslaught" that "provides the methodological justification for the debunking of the mind by the intellectuals."<sup>26</sup>

#### IV

I hope to have created greater uncertainty about what may be taken for granted in literary criticism. Where does literary criticism pretend, for the sake of disciplinary convenience, that mental phenomena are irrelevant to critical inquiry, and perhaps even unreal? Although I have concentrated largely in this article on intention and meaning, there are other discipline-founding injunctions that exclude subjective phenomena from critical inquiry. Again, Wimsatt and Beardsley provide a useful illustration. Their argument against "The Affective Fallacy" assumes the irrelevance of subjective phenomena to reader-response: "The reports of some readers [...] that a poem or story induces in them vivid images, intense feelings, or heightened consciousness, is neither anything which can be refuted nor anything which it is possible for the objective critic to take into account."<sup>27</sup> Wimsatt and Beardsley may yet be vindicated. But their argument against the relevance of affective reports relies upon the assumption found in "The Intentional Fallacy" that such reports are inevitably both incorrigible and capricious, and that reference to subjective response would therefore replace the author's oracular authority with that of the reader. Their conclusion is certainly not shared by Jane Tompkins in her monograph, *West of Everything: the Inner Life of Westerns*. It is really the inner lives of readers of Westerns that interests Tompkins: "You go to a Western for [...] the feeling that adventure stimulates [...] First the narrow rivulet of fear running inside you that widens or narrows depending on how close the danger is. Then moments of excited dread—dry throat, tingling palms, accelerated heartbeat—the high. Then moments of relief, the body at ease, comforted, letting go."<sup>28</sup> Tompkins's recuperation of affective



response is not isolated: her work bears a family resemblance to Robert C. Solomon's defense of sentimental literary response,<sup>29</sup> and also to my own attack on what he perceives as a "taboo on tenderness" in literary theory.<sup>30</sup> The work of Tompkins, Solomon, and myself can be seen as a prolonged attack on the apathetic fallacy within the realm of reader response—just as Knapp and Michaels can be regarded as exposing and attacking the apathetic fallacy in literary semantics, and just as I may be regarded as criticizing the apathetic fallacy in Jameson's Lacan-inspired literary theory (and also in Lacanian theory, *per se*).

I offer the concept of the "apathetic fallacy" as a way of classifying and characterizing one of the central errors of contemporary critical inquiry: namely, an insistence on an objective, "outer" ontology for the objects of literary criticism, and a corresponding repudiation of the "inner life" of all our literary practices. A disciplinary audit is, I think, needed in order to discover just where we may have fallen into an habitual and unwarranted neglect of subjective phenomena. Without such a re-examination of what we take for granted, then literary criticism, by insisting on the irrelevance and even the unreality of mental phenomena, will continue to commit the apathetic fallacy.

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